

PENRY PARK  
Kentucky and Mary Streets  
Petaluma  
Sonoma County  
California

HALS CA-51  
CA-51

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE  
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## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### PENRY PARK

HALS NO. CA-51

Location: Kentucky and Mary Streets, Petaluma, Sonoma County, CA  
Lat: 38.23639° Long: -122.6421

Significance: Penry Park was the first park established in the town of Petaluma, CA and appears to meet National Register Criteria A and C. It is significant in the categories of social history, landscape architecture, recreation, and in community planning and development. It is associated with the Parks Movement, with the Women's Improvement Clubs movements, and with the Temperance Movement. It is also associated with early settlers and important figures in Petaluma, including Mrs. H. H. Atwater and Miss Rena Shattuck.

History: Platted when the town was laid out, the park was first referred to as "The Plaza" or "the Upper Plaza" and predates the now common idea of providing parks for towns. The plaza received haphazard treatment, at best, and often functioned as a cut-through and dumping ground, according to early newspaper reports. On May 28, 1896 the Ladies' Improvement Club was formed with the express purpose of improving this and the "Lower Plaza", which became Walnut Park, with a hope that the spaces could be made presentable for that year's Independence Day celebrations.

The Ladies' Improvement Club was an excellent example of the many clubs of the era that were started by women with the express purpose of improving the social and physical surroundings of towns and cities. Miss Rena Shattuck was a local author who hosted the first meeting of the Ladies' Improvement Club and who, along with Mrs. H.H. Atwater, steered and directed the club. Mrs. Atwater was a resourceful and influential woman and president of the Improvement Club. Soon the park was organized, planted, and furnished with benches. It seems unlikely that the paths were in place when the ladies' work began; certainly the Ladies' Improvement Club was responsible for the overall design, which is still in place today. Minutes from the Ladies' Club show that the women raised funds and paid for the park improvements and maintenance over several years. A parks commission and permanent funding for parks was not in place until 1911, suggesting the Ladies' work continued at least until that time.

Early photographs show the park stuffed full of trees, including rows of young date palms and fan palms, interspersed with unidentified broadleaf trees. The paths appear to have been gravel edged with cobblestones with short concrete forms, square with squat pyramidal tops, marking the corners at the city sidewalks. Iron park benches, restrained in design for the Victorian era, were placed next to the pathways.

Many park improvements occurred in Petaluma in the 1950s and this is the likely date of the benches being replaced by simple iron pipe and wood benches. The WWI memorial was installed in 1929, with large cannons on each side. The cannons were scrapped for their metal during WWII and the small-scale mortars were installed in 1949. In the 1950s and 1960s the park was nearly given over to other uses or as a buildings site, including a parking structure. Townspeople rallied to save the park, but a portion of the southern end,

including a section of stone retaining wall, was removed to increase parking space on the adjacent street. Many trees have been lost over the intervening years, but enough remain to show the intent of the original designers.

**Description:** Penry Park is located one block north of the main downtown area of Petaluma on a rise that affords views over Petaluma Boulevard, the Old East Side section of town, and the northern edge of downtown. An abrupt grade change occurs at the park; the western edge rises while the eastern sidewalk drops steadily, requiring a tall retaining wall along the eastern edge and a banked hillside on the southern edge. The wall is made of granite stones commonly used for curbing in Petaluma during the early days of settlement. Diagonal paths of deteriorating asphalt extend from each corner of the rectangular lot to cross the park; the paths are reached via concrete steps at the southeast, southwest, and northeast corners. The bank between the southeast and southwest stairs is thickly covered in ice plant (a stone retaining wall once stood here until the 1960s). In the center of the park is located a large silk oak tree (*Grevillea robusta*). There are several palm trees in the park, with enough remaining to suggest that they were once planted on a grid pattern throughout the park. The northeast corner of the park is anchored by a small grove of redwood trees. The eastern edge of the park sits atop the thick stone retaining wall and is edged in juniper shrubs; the wall is approximately seven feet tall. Set back a short distance from the wall is a World War I marble memorial that includes a pair of World War II mortars. The memorial is flanked by a pair of yew trees and a magnolia tree. In 2001 the name of the park was changed to Penry Park and a stone-faced memorial to the Vietnam veteran Richard Penry was placed in the park. Benches that appear to date to the 1950s are placed throughout the park, adjacent to the pathways. The park also includes a contemporary drinking fountain and trash cans.

**Sources:** An Illustrated History of Sonoma County, California. Containing a history of the county of Sonoma from the earliest period of its occupancy to the present time. Salem, Mass. : Higginson Book Company, 1999. (Reprint of 1889 edition published by Lewis Publishing Company.)

“Ladies are Busy, Work of the Petaluma Ladies Improvement Club.” Santa Rosa Democrat, Feb. 15, 1899.

Minutes of the Ladies' Improvement Club for 1896.

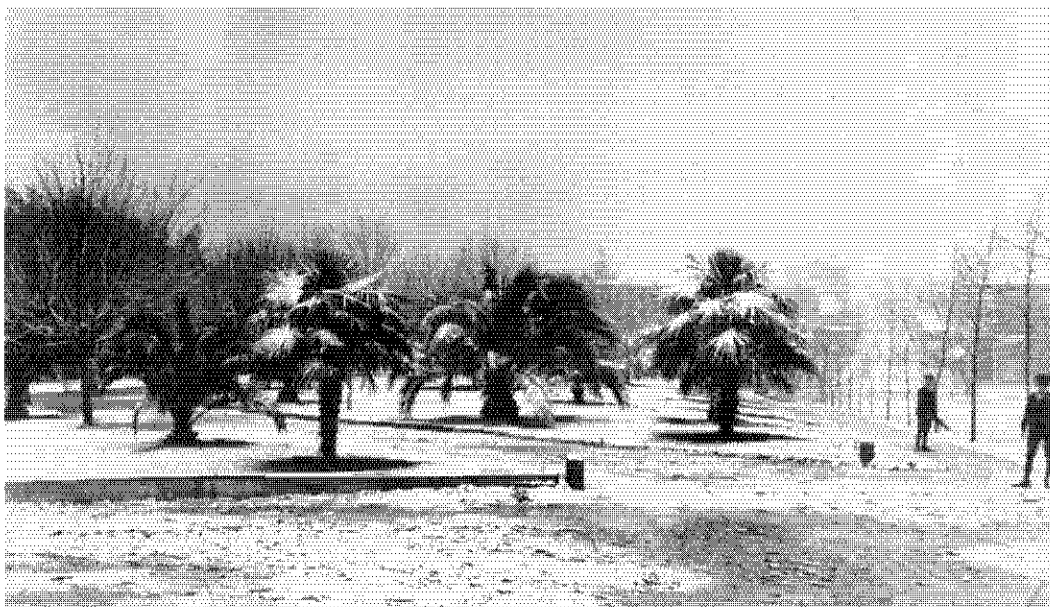
Various articles from the Petaluma Argus and Petaluma Daily Courier newspapers, later merged to form the Petaluma Argus Courier: (no month on copy) 1852, 3/5/1870, 1/28/1876, 3/11/1893, 1/17/1929,

Historic photographs and postcards located at the Petaluma Historical Library and Museum and at the Petaluma History Room in the Sonoma County Library

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The northwest corner of Penry Park with a view to downtown. (Janet Gracyk, July 14, 2008).



The undated historic image was taken from the northwest corner of Penry Park, then known as Hill Plaza. Photo shows an unusual snowfall. (Petaluma Historical Library and Museum, used with permission).